

Of course we were not able to meet with Mr. Sharif that day. We did meet with President Musharraf on that trip, but we were not able to meet with Mr. Sharif. Again, this is an area that will bear close scrutiny and watching over the next weeks and months because, again, as I will stress, each of these areas are so interrelated and so tied together.

Clearly the Afghanistan-Pakistan border area is one issue, but there are other links to other areas where terrorism is problematic that come out of that federally administered tribal area. The Spanish have discovered recently a link between some of their home-grown terrorists and the federally administered tribal area of Pakistan. Likewise, the Germans have discovered some terrorist links to Pakistan via Turkey.

In Britain, several of the terrorist groups within Great Britain can be traced to the federally administered tribal area, that border area between Afghanistan and Pakistan. So it is clear that terrorist activities taking place in that region of Pakistan are having a direct and profound effect on the security of European countries and certainly our NATO allies.

The terrorist activity has direct and dire consequences on foreign elections. We saw that happen in Spain several years ago when the March 11 bombings obviously or significantly influenced the outcome of the elections in that country. That behavior in turn led to a new government that then subsequently withdrew its troops from Afghanistan. And subsequently I think the mission was certainly not strengthened by that exercise.

But all in all, I would say it was a very informative trip, and I am grateful to President Musharraf and grateful to Mr. Zardari for meeting with us on relatively short notice during that trip. And there is no question, it was very informative to have that level of discussion.

I also made my seventh trip into the country of Iraq during that congressional delegation. I had last been in July of this past year, July of 2007. At that point I wasn't quite sure what I was going to find when I returned to Iraq that time. I found the situation to be much better than I expected it to be, and I will say that in the intervening 6 or 7 months since I was last there, the situation has improved even more.

No question about it, troop morale has always been good. I have never seen a problem with troop morale in any of the trips I have taken into Iraq. And in this past trip, it was nothing short of spectacular.

One of the things that was perhaps a little different about this trip and something that I really had not been able to do on previous trips was venture directly into some of the neighborhoods in and around Baghdad. The reason we were able to do that was because of the establishment of the joint security stations. These are the areas where American troops are embedded

with Iraq security forces and Iraqi policemen. They are there side by side day in and day out. This was the concept that General David Petraeus brought to Iraq a year ago when the famous surge or reinforcements were brought into that country. It was a strategy not without some risk and certainly many of us were justifiably concerned about that.

I know in my trip into Iraq in July in the C-130 sitting with troops as we were going from Kuwait City into Baghdad, several voiced real concern that, you know, we are going to be living side by side with the Iraqis. If there is an interruption of fuel or material or food, then certainly we could be at risk in these situations because no longer will we be going back to the base every night. You could sense there was some concern.

The situation has been one that has been enormously successful. And as a consequence, the Iraqis have gained a great deal more confidence in the American troops that are there and their ability to provide security and to react quickly. And Iraqi citizens are coming forward with much more information, information about the location of IEDs, information about the bomb-making factories, and information about people who may be doing things that are harmful to a neighborhood. So it has been an overall improvement in the relationship between regular Iraqis and the American soldiers and an improvement in our ability to gather that all-important intelligence to be able to fight this war in the way it should be fought.

Again, I would stress that it is our men and the Iraqis living side by side.

Here we are just arriving at the joint security station. We are getting a briefing there just after arrival. At that point I think they were going over the briefing on the number of IED attacks, and there was basically a Google Earth map with all of the IED explosions plotted out on the map. Red ones were where people were hurt, and blue ones where a bomb went off and no one was hurt, and yellow was where the bomb was discovered after it went off.

July and August, those photographs were literally covered with dots of one color or another. And then going through month by month, August, September, October, the numbers diminished rapidly such that in December and January, there were very few dots on the map of any sort at all. And certainly you could see in a very graphical fashion the effect of having our troops embedded on the ground and living side by side with the Iraqis.

We had seen this in the summer, in the trip in July in the city of Ramadi out in Anbar province, and now that has been fairly widely reported that there has been the Anbar awakening and the Sunnis who previously would have perhaps partnered with al Qaeda to work against the Americans had changed allegiance and changed sides and saw now the Americans as their

helpers and their friends, and the city of Ramadi was markedly different in July of 2007 from July of 2006. And as a consequence then, this same sort of activity now going on in the area of Baghdad that would have been just absolutely impassable 6 months before in the month of July, and we were now able to walk around on the streets.

This is within the living quarters that the soldiers have there. The Minnesota National Guard had done some refurbishing and furnishing of the barracks there. They had tried to make it a little more homey. You can see the ubiquitous widescreen television at the top. This is a bench that had been fashioned out of some scrap wood that was around. And they had done a wonderful job as far as making the living conditions as good as could be expected.

Again, the morale of our soldiers was unlike anything I have ever seen. Clearly they understand what they are doing, and clearly they understand that they are very close to achieving success. It is something that I wish almost every Member of Congress could go over there and see in these joint security stations because it really is a moving experience.

As a consequence of these activities, al Qaeda that was so prevalent in Anbar province and along the Euphrates River Valley have been diminished to a minimum amount. Al Qaeda in Baghdad is significantly diminished as well. There are still some problems in the area around Sadr City, but with some of these embedded areas moving into that area, we will perhaps see some improvement there as well.

The former Sunni insurgents have turned their back on the insurgency. They are cooperating with coalition forces. That cooperation again is yielding good intelligence. In fact, in another part of this particular base where we were, this police station we were in, we got to see some of the surveillance activity as it was going on, and remarkable, remarkable efforts by our soldiers, by our men.

At one point a device had gone off and caused some injuries in the marketplace, and one of our young men painstakingly went back through the photos and tapes and actually discovered some physical characteristics of the individual that looked as if he may have planted the device. And then partly by luck but partly by good detective work, found that same man in a marketplace later on, brought him in for questioning, and certainly we were able to make the case of the connection between that individual and the bomb that had gone off.

One of the great things was that although the detective work was done by our soldiers with their equipment, when it came time to apprehend this individual, he was actually apprehended by the Iraqi police and brought in by the Iraqi police so the citizenry could see that their police force was up and running and functioning.

A good news story all along. But one disturbing note was on further study of